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AUTHOR Storm, Anne-Marie
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the differences in views of male and female participants in the Natural Helpers program. The program was developed primarily to serve middle and high school students who want to increase their helping and communication skills so they can better help and support others. The central Virginian school in the study had received a grant, part of which included this peer-helping program. Seventh and eighth grade students participated. Two surveys were administered, one before and one after the training retreat. Overall, the male and female natural helpers had many of the same views on the program and on their role as a natural helper. There were some notable differences. Males expected to learn how to better help their friends from the retreat where females expected to get to know other natural helpers, students as well as teachers. Also, where the females were first unsure of their helping skills, they later had the confidence that they could help their friends in some way. The males, on the other hand, were first sure of their helping skills and later recognized their limitations. Other findings include the indication that females were more comfortable in sharing and talking about their feelings, and females more than males had dealt with a suicidal friend. (Author/LLL)

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NATURAL HELPERS: THE DIFFERENCES IN VIEWS OF THE MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

Anne-Marie Storm

Curry School of Education

University of Virginia

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ABSTRACT

A study of the differences in views of male and female participants in the Natural Helpers program was conducted in early 1991. The central Virginian school in study had received a grant, part of which included this peer-helping program. Two surveys were administered, one before and one after the training retreat. Notable gender differences found were males expected to learn how to better help their friends from the retreat where females expected to get to know other natural helpers, students as well as teachers. Also, where the females were first unsure of their helping skills, they later had the confidence that they could help their friends in some way. The males, on the other hand, were first sure of their helping skills, and later recognized their limitations. Lastly, the females felt more comfortable sharing their feelings as compared to their male peers.

Drug abuse among school age children is a problem which is not going to disappear just like that. In society today, youngsters have to deal with an increasing divorce rate, more working mothers, and peer pressures. These factors provide the kids with more choices, however, there is less structure to the way they live. More and more children are committing suicide which is a sign of the children's feeling of helplessness in dealing with the pressures from school, friends, and parents (Swift, 1983).

Several prevention methods have been tried, but many of them have been ineffective. An example of an ineffective approach to the prevention of drug abuse is education. Usually, films and stories are used to show the terrible things that could happen to you if you choose to use drugs. Evidence has shown, however, that these stories actually stimulate curiosity. Once the children discover that taking drugs will not result in immediate horrible consequences, they discredit the educational source. Therefore, scare tactics don't work (Oster, 1983).

During the 1970's, new developments in prevention

strategies occurred. The thought of the time included, "a new emphasis upon individuals and the human potential, a dissatisfaction with education, the concept of alternatives to alcohol abuse, and an emphasis on affective education (Oster, 1983, p.189)." This resulted in the making of new programs involving peer counseling and peer helping. These types of programs have been used and studied all over the United States and are still popular today.

I chose to study one program in depth, the Natural Helpers program. Information about this program and others is provided next to give a better understanding of my study.

When researching the topic of peer helpers, I noticed that all of the programs had certain similarities among them. The main similarities included activities, training procedures, and selection processes. One of the earliest peer helper programs is Project Youth. This project was conducted by the Youth Research Center in Minnesota from 1970-1973. Its goals include learning interpersonal skills, developing increased self-esteem and openness, and achieving

higher levels of interpersonal trust. One part of the program, PEER (Positive Educational Experiences in Relationships), includes a weekend retreat where the participants set personal goals, identify personal strengths, learn to be better listeners, learn communication skills, and learn values and acceptance for others (Hebseisen, 1973).

A different section of Project Youth is EXTEND. Its goal is for children to learn how to extend friendship toward other young people. Activities for EXTEND include sharing and role playing (Fletcher, Norem-Hebseisen, Johnson, & Underwager, 1974).

Another program, Peer Power: Becoming an Effective Peer Helper, was used in Indiana in the mid-1980's. Students are selected for this program after submitting a formal application and having an interview. The students should show, "warmth, interest, acceptance of others, tolerance of divergent value systems, and high energy levels (Tindall, & Gray, 1985, p. 74)." The goals of Peer Power state that the participants,

> will learn how to listen, understand, and communicate better - to listen to what others are

> really saying or feeling, to understand what others really mean, and to feed back what they have learned in ways that will enable others to handle some rough spots in their lives (Tindall, & Gray, 1985, p. 74).

The roles of the participants will include talking with students about their feelings; talking with disruptive students; referring peers to other sources of help in the community; giving information on drugs, sex, venereal diseases; and helping students with their school problems (Tindall, et al., 1985). During training, the students begin by looking at themselves and then learn a series of skills which include empathy, summarizing, questioning, genuineness, assertiveness, confrontation, and problem solving. Advanced training includes topics on drugs and alcohol abuse intervention and prevention, moving towards wellness through stress management, developing human potential, and leadership training.

Other peer helper programs have been designed to be classed offered in school. Real Talk: Exercises in Friendship and Helping Skills teaches students how to

be better friends. Participants learn about barriers to good communication, basic friendship skills, perceiving feelings, facilitative responding, nonverbal communication, problem solving, how to deal with conflict and anger, understanding others, and being understood by them, and leadership (Gazda, Walters, & Childers, 1981).

Another course which was used in Griffin Middle School located in the Atlanta area is Peer Helping: A Successful Exploratory Course. Students are selected for the program by teachers. Some enroll in the class to learn how to help others while some wish to get help for themselves. This course is based on the model developed by Varenhorst and Hamburg(1978) and also from Real Talk: Exercises in Friendship and Helping Skills. The students learn communication skills, helping skills, effective levels of facilitative responses, decision making and problem solving, and the strategies and ethics of peer helping (Swift, 1983). They discuss these topics one on one as well as in small and large groups.

Peer helping has been used for drug prevention but

also for other needy areas. B.U.I.L.D., Building Urban Involvement through Leadership Development, is an agency in Chicago that uses peers to help with gang prevention. 95% of the employees are former gang members. These people go to local elementary schools and discuss how gangs recruit and the violence they can cause (Jason, & Rhodes, 1989). Some school systems have used peer helping as a buddy system where a new student is matched with one of the peer helpers.

The whole school system in Hampton, Virginia adopted a comprehensive school based program with cooperative community involvement. A unique part of this program was "Adopt-A-Class" where a team of trained high school students visits a chosen learning disabilities classroom throughout the year (Carlson, 1990). Still other schools, such as Griffin Middle School in Atlanta, have programs where students themselves develop the activities and curriculum (Jason, et al., 1989).

NATURAL HELPERS

The program I chose to study is Natural Helpers. I found very little research on this program. Natural

Helpers® was developed by the Comprehensive Health Education Foundation based in Seattle, Washington. It is used across the United States and in several other countries. The program was developed to primarily serve middle school and high school students who want to increase their helping and communication skills so they can better help and support others.

The basis of the Natural Helpers Program is that in every school, an informal helping network already exists. Students have certain people, whether they are other students or teachers, who they turn to when they have a problem. The Natural Helpers Program was designed to build upon this framework and strengthen it.

The Natural Helpers program was developed with four goals in mind. The first is for young people to develop ways to prevent some of the problems of adolescence. The second is for the participants to develop the capability to deal more effectively with their troubled peers. Thirdly, the program hopes that the students will learn to choose more positive ways of taking care of themselves. Last, the students will

improve their school and community (Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (CHEF), 1989).

The Natural Helpers program has many features distinguishing it form other peer helping programs. The way the students and teachers are selected is by a school-wide survey (CHEF, 1989). Students are asked to put down the people who they trust and turn to when they have a problem. From this survey, students who represent all subgroups of the school are selected by a committee of teachers. This is not a popularity contest. There will be Natural Helpers who represent such groups as the "geeks", "jocks", "druggies", "preppies", etc. The whole student population will be represented. By bringing together students from all subgroups, the program hopes that these students will see the similarities between themselves which will then contribute to a more positive school environment. Once the helpers are selected, they are trained to better deal with the concerns that all the students feel are a problem in their school.

The roles of the Natural Helpers are quite varied. First and foremost, a Natural Helper is just that, a

helper, not a counselor. They need to recognize their limits. One role is for participants to recognize when a person has a serious problem and to refer that individual. Natural Helpers are there to continue helping their friends with their concerns. The helpers can lend a sympathetic ear to loners and new students. Another role is to work with members of a team and discuss issues and specific problems. They are to maintain confidentiality at all times. Lastly, the Natural Helpers should become more involved with their school and community (CHEF, 1989).

TRAINING:

After being selected as Natural Helpers, the chosen teachers and students, with parental permission, go on a three day training retreat away from the school. Usually a local campsite or lodge is used. The atmosphere of being away from school is more conducive for the participants to concentrate on the training. It also helps the participants to develop positive relationships for everyone is together for an extended period of time.

The topics for the first day of the retreat

include introduction, labeling, you as a helper, trust, and teamwork. The day begins with playing name games and learning the goals of the program and the roles of a Natural Helper. The goals for the labeling topic include identifying the harmful effects of labeling and reducing labeling during the retreat training. In the lesson on You As A Helper, the participants brainstorm to identify the helping qualities of a Natural Helper. They also learn that they need to help themselves before they help others. During the trust lesson, the participants think about the people whom they trust and why. They also take turns leading a blindfolded person on a trust walk. During teamwork, the students and teachers are told they do not have to work alone but can use each other as support. All days end with a review and reflection time (CHEF, 1989).

The second day's topics include knowing when friends need help, expressing care and concern, the Helping Skill and its barriers, sharing and scrolls. Under "Knowing when Friends Need Help", the participants discuss school concerns. They also talk about signs to look for in a troubled person. They

participate in an activity where a person changes three things about his/her appearance and everyone has to guess want those changes are. Lastly, they discuss and learn about types of communication that do not display a helping attitude.

The Helping Skill is a values clarification strategy. The participants are modeled the skill, and they take turns role playing situations where they would use the skill. The barriers to the Helping Skill are discussed after lunch. These include the participants recognizing their limits of energy, time, and abilities. After dinner, the natural helpers spend time sharing about themselves (CHEF, 1989).

The last day includes a review of the Helping Skill, situations requiring professional helping resources, how to contact a resource, taking care of ourselves and others, and the wrap-up. When discussing and learning about how to take care of themselves, the participants are prepared for re-entry into the school. They discuss what it will be like and how they will be treated once they return (CHEF, 1989). There are conflicting views whether Natural Helpers should be

made a big deal of or kept as low key as possible. The school I studied made a big deal.

LIFE AFTER THE RETREAT:

Once the students have completed their retreat and are settled back into the school environment, certain negatives attributes should begin to be reduced. The use of drugs, involvement in sex, and low academic achievement should decline in the school. Participation in antisocial behaviors and susceptibility to peer pressure should be reduced. The inability to cope with stress should decline in the students. Lastly, there should no longer be a lack of a trusted helping resource or ignorance of information about adolescent concerns (CHEF, 1989). I found no reports on the reduction of these attributes due to the Natural Helpers program. However, research from a peer helper program in Utah showed that alcohol usage was not significantly reduced and students self-reported problems did not decrease. The only positive finding was that participants in the program did improve their peer-counseling skills (Oster, 1983).

Natural Helpers also undergo ongoing training

which includes a semester of classes or a series of lessons. Some of the topics are local helping resources, pregnancy, sexual abuse, stress, depression and suicide, and chemical dependency. These topics will better train the participants to deal with these problems. Once completing this, the Natural Helpers will continue to meet as a group on various occasions (CHEF, 1989).

PROBLEM

I studied a middle school in central Virginia which has just begun the Natural Helper program this year. This school was given a three-part grant to help prevent and intervene with substance abuse. The Natural Helper program is one such part. The school is made up of 600 seventh and eighth grade students. There is approximately a 50% minority population. This school serves all of the city, so there is a wide socio-economic student body with more students coming from low income families.

The problem I wished to study is the differences in the views of the male and female participants in the Natural Helpers program. I also wanted to see if the

training retreat would focus the participants towards its major goals, thereby decreasing the perceived differences between males and females. Since girls mature more quickly than boys, I expected to find some striking differences.

METHOD

To study the problem I had chosen, I developed two surveys: one to give before the students went on the retreat, one to give on their return. Many of the questions are directly from the Natural Helpers Leader's Guide. Each survey was approved by my supervisor and the principal of the school in study. I then analyzed each survey, compared the results of the two, and then drew my conclusions. I produced a frequency table for each item, therefore making in easier to analyze. I then looked for varying views between the males and females from the frequency tables. This lead to my conclusions which are based on how the participants' responses changed from survey to survey.

PRE-TRAINING SURVEY:

I wrote the pre-training survey with several things in mind. I wanted it to be confidential, therefore I had the students use code names. By ensuring confidentiality, I believed that the students would be more honest in their responses. The questions I wrote were to find out more about how the students viewed themselves as helpers and also what they expected to gain from the program. A sample of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

I administered this survey when the students had met as a group to discuss final details of the retreat. I was able to give specific directions and answer any questions that they might have.

Item three, "In your own words, define what a Natural Helper is.", which is the only open response item, was written to discover what the students believed a Natural Helper is. Nine males completed this question: four seventh graders, five eighth graders. The most frequent response was a person who is selected to help people with their problems. All nine males wrote this idea, yet using different

phrasing. Only two of the males responded that a Natural Helper is someone you can trust.

Thirteen females answered this item: eight seventh graders, five eighth graders. All thirteen females also wrote that a Natural Helper is a person who helps other people with their problems. And again only two used the word trust when defining Natural Helper.

This question suggests that both the males and females view what a Natural Helper is in the same way. The only difference is 22% of the males used the word trust compared to only 15% of the females.

Item four, "Before I was chosen as a Natural Helper, I...," was included to see if there was any difference in how much the students perceived they knew about the program. I wanted to find out if any of the students had "researched" the program before becoming involved in it. The only information given to the students prior to the administration of the Natural Helpers Selection Survey is given in Appendix B (CHEF, 1989). A copy of the actual survey in included in Appendix C (CHEF, 1989).

Twelve males answered this question: seven seventh

graders, four eighth graders. 17% of the males stated they knew a little about the program, and 83% said they knew nothing. Thirteen females completed question four: eight seventh graders and five eighth graders. 8% of the females wrote they knew somewhat of the program, 92% said they knew nothing.

From these results, I interpret that the males were better informed about the Natural Helpers program. Either they asked more questions about it, or had heard more about it through another source.

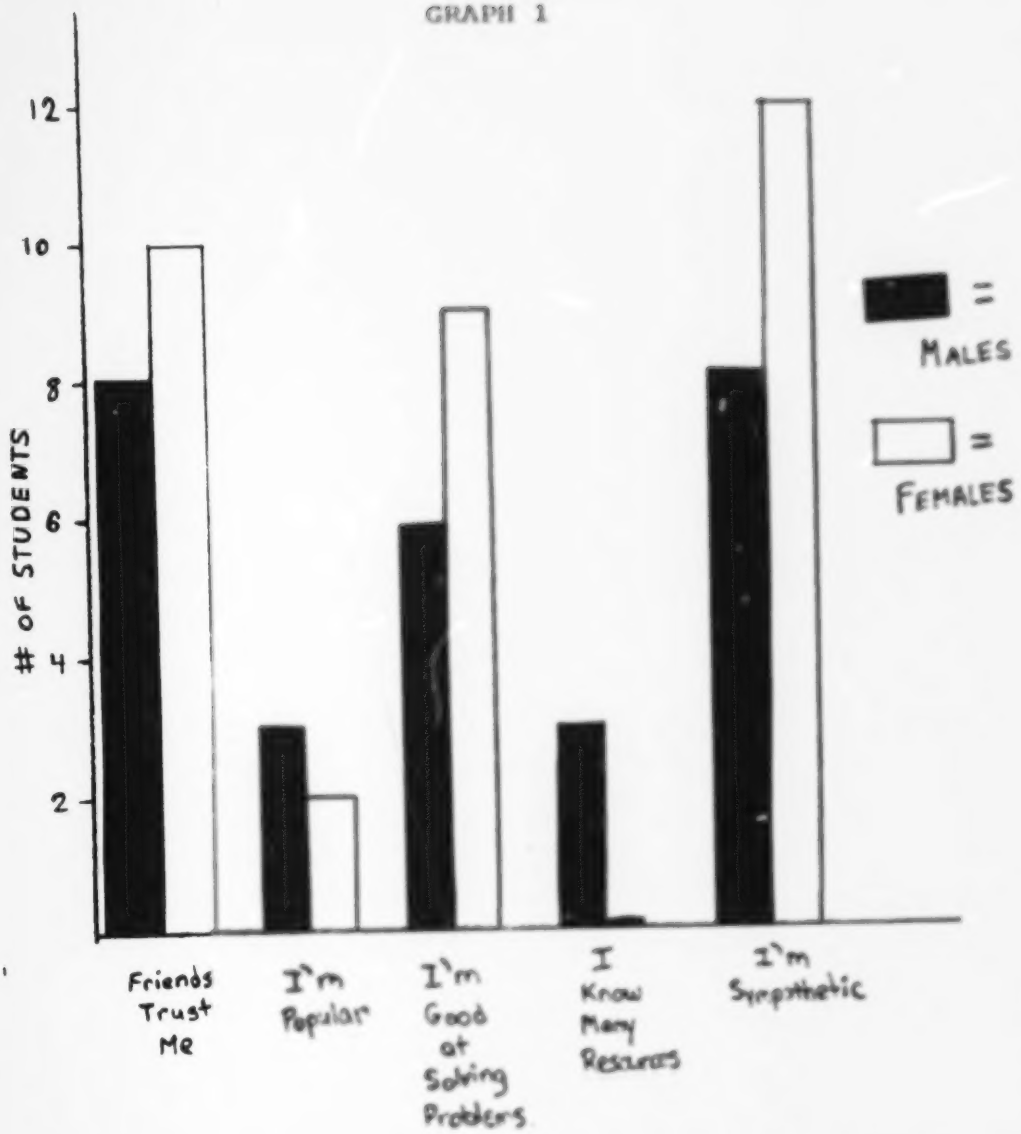
Question five, "I was chosen as a Natural Helper because...," was written to find out the reasons why the students believed they were chosen as a Natural Helper. In this question, they could choose more than one answer. The answers a)my friends trust me, c) I'm good at solving problems, d) I know many resources, and e) I'm sympathetic and know how to listen well are all traits that can be found in the Natural Helpers Leader's Guide. One of the training activities, "Qualities of a Natural Helper," is designed for the participants to find what their strengths are as a helper. The qualities listed as answers a,c,d,e are

ones that frequently come up during this activity.

Looking at these results, which are depicted in Graph 1, I learned that the male Natural Helpers believed they were chosen mostly for their trust and ability to listen well. These two answers were the most popular for the females also, although the percentages for the females were higher. Also, none of the females believed they were chosen due to their knowledge of resources, where 18% of the males chose this as an answer. One possible explanation would be that males are more open to seeking outside help when dealing with a problem. Lastly, both sexes had high percentages for the answer, "good at solving problems.", yet the females had a higher percentage. This is surprising, for stereotypically, males are known for their problem solving ability, not females.

In item six, "I have had which of the following come to me with a problem," I was curious to see whether males or females would only have their gender or both sexes come to them for advice. All male participants completed this item: six seventh graders, five eighth graders. Only 18% said just boys come to

GRAPH 1



Answers to Question five, "I was chosen as a Natural Helper, because..."

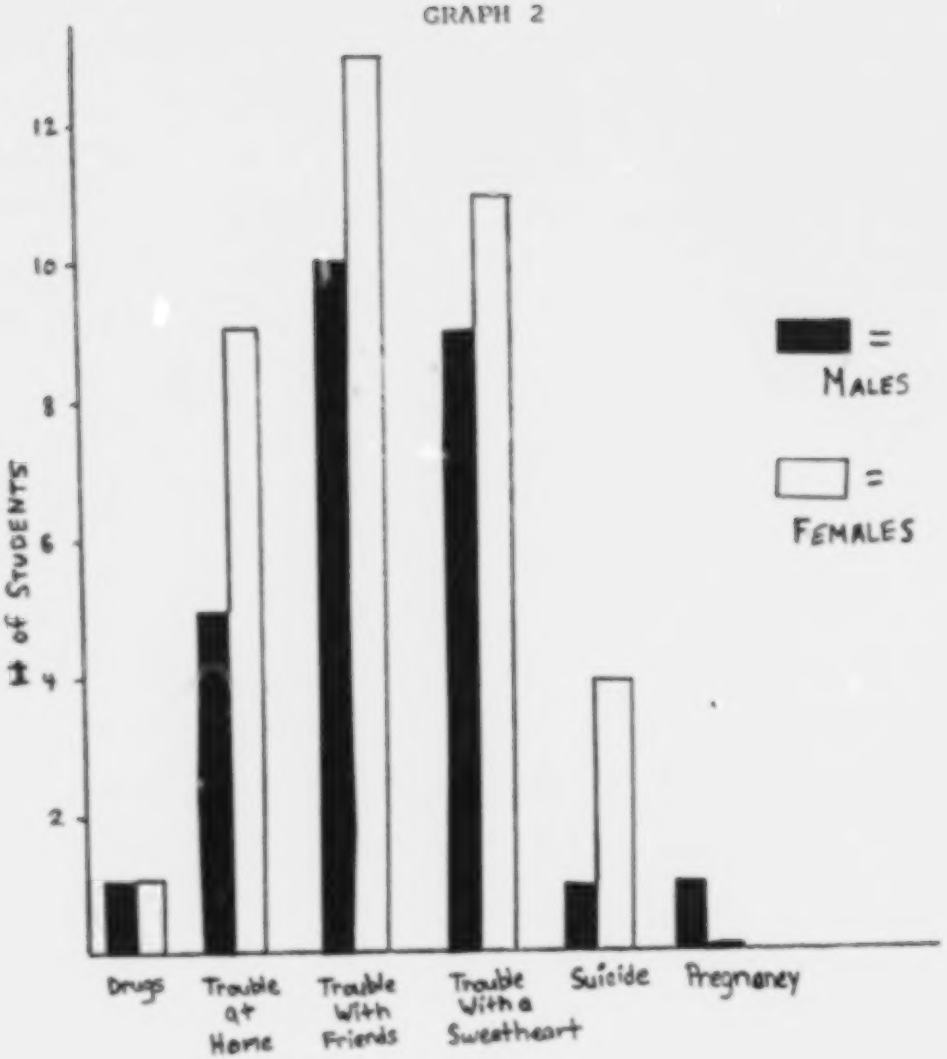
them with problems where 82% stated that both males and females seek their advice. All female participants also answered this question: eight seventh graders, five eighth graders. Here, 23% of the females reported that only girls come to them with their problems, and 77% replied that both sexes turn to them when they have a problem.

Reviewing these results, I found that there is no gender difference in who goes to a male or female for help. Both had a high percentage of both sexes coming to them for help.

In item seven, "I have had people come to me with the following problems," I was interested in learning the kinds of problems that the students have been presented. The students could circle as many answers that applied to them. All of the males and females answered this question.

Looking at Graph 2, one can see that trouble with friends and sweethearts are the main problems that these pre-adolescents face. The most remarkable of my findings is that 31% of the females have had someone who is contemplating suicide come to them. This

GRAPH 2



Answers to Question seven, "I have had people come to me with the following problems."

percentage is substantially higher than the males (9%). A possible explanation for this is that females are more willing to listen about something like suicide, where males are not. Females mature faster than males, and perhaps pressure and stress affect them more at this age (Ingersoll, 1981). This is assuming that it was females who came to the girls for advice.

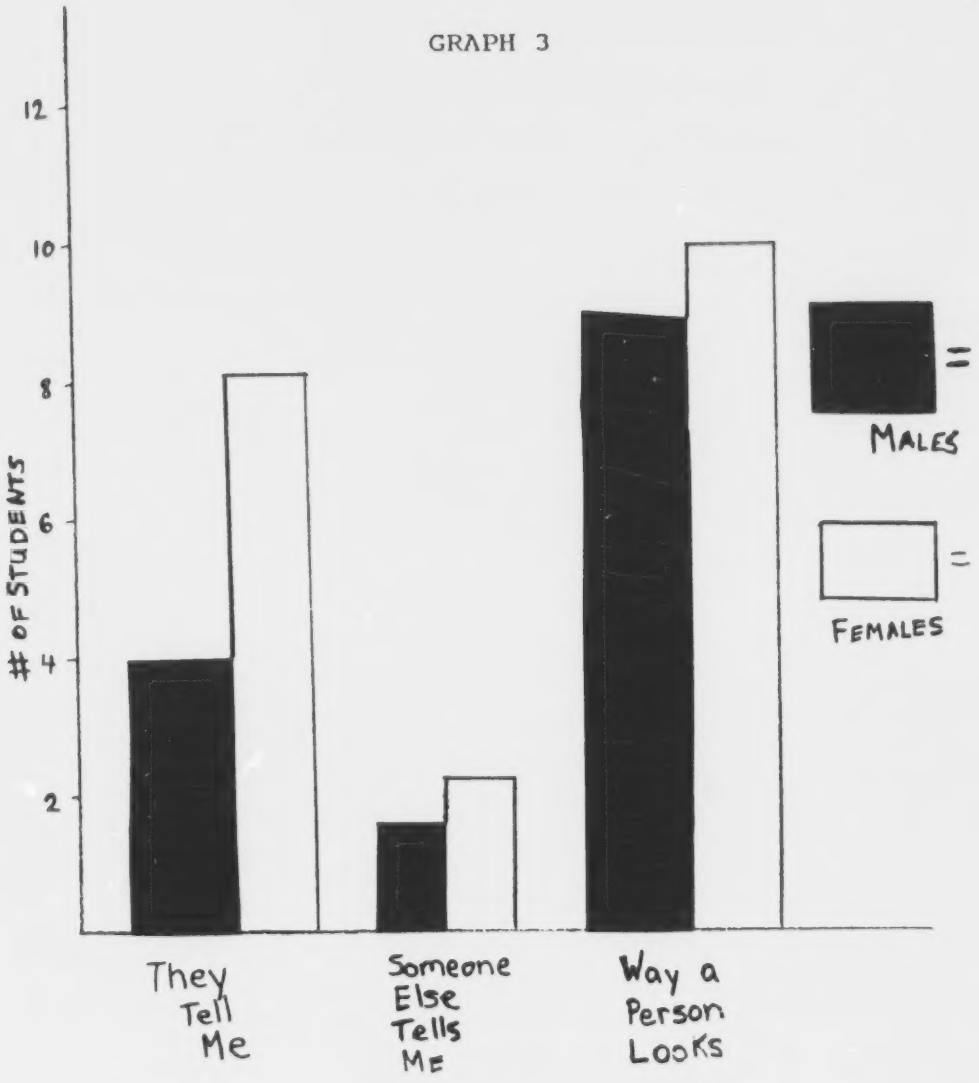
With question eight, "When my friends come to me with a problem, I ...,: I wished to find out how sure of themselves the participants felt when helping someone. All students completed this item. 45% of the boys believed they could always help someone. 45% also circled that they felt they could only help some of the time. 9% believed that they could listen, but felt they could never help. The female responses were: 31% believed they could always help, 69% believed they could help only sometimes, and 0% answered that they could never help.

From these results, I would state that the boys are more sure of their abilities to help. This could be due to their inability to see their limitations or their actual strengths.

In item nine, "I can tell when a person has a problem, because...," I wanted to see if there were any differences in how the participants knew when a friend was in need. I would learn if the students were good observers or if peers had to come right out ad tell them they had a problem. The directions were to circle one answer, yet two males and six females chose more than one. All students answered this question.

From these results, found in Graph 3, I discovered that middle schoolers feel more comfortable going directly to a female peer for help. A plausible explanation for this might be that these students are used to going to their mothers advice, but now they feel mom might not understand so they turn to a girl friend (Ingersoll, 1981). Other findings are that both the male and female Natural Helpers are good at recognizing when a person is in trouble and might need some help. This suggests that these Natural Helpers are aggressors and don't wait for the person to come to them. Lastly, very few Natural Helpers hear about their peers' problems through other people. This surprised me , for I consider twelve and thirteen year

GRAPH 3



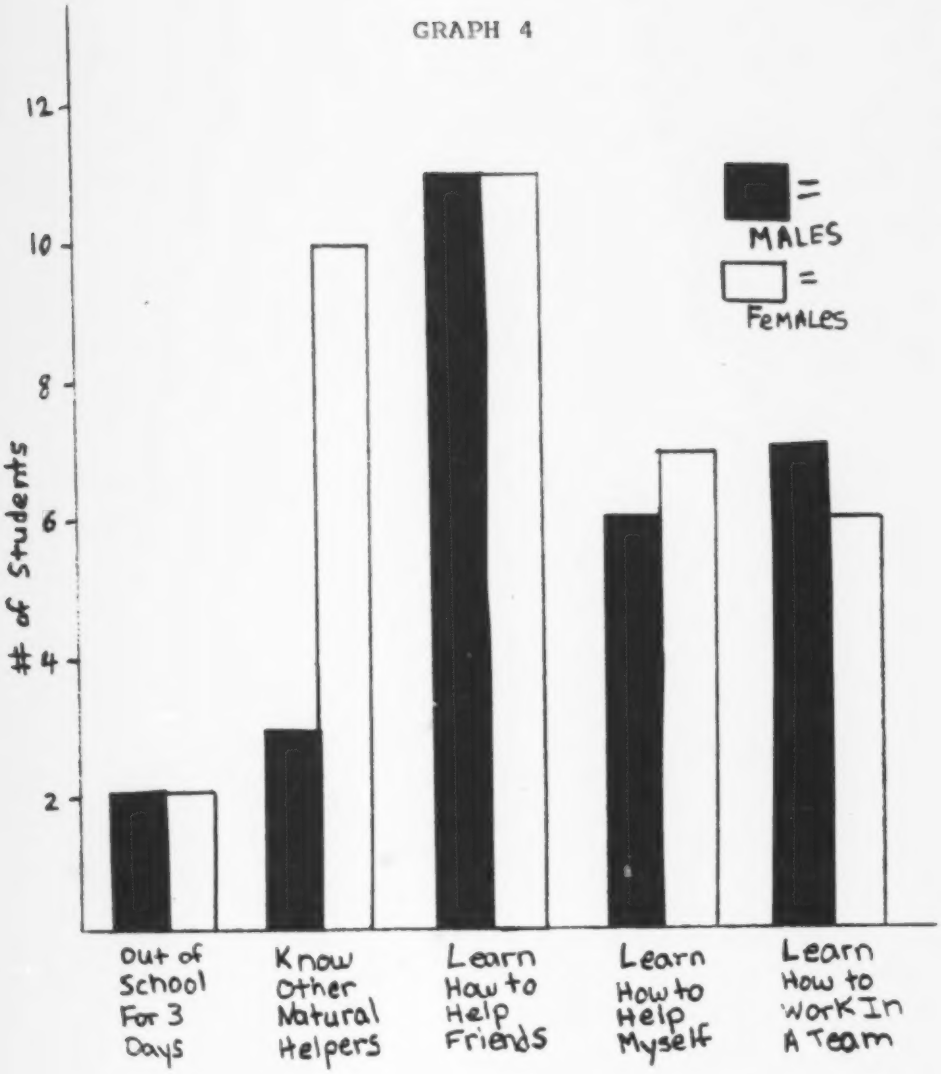
Responses to Item nine, "I can tell when a person has a problem, because..."

olds to be at a "gossipy" age.

I chose the answers for item ten directly out of the Natural Helpers Leader's Guide, except for answer a. This question, "I think the purpose of the training retreat is...," was designed to learn what the participants wanted and expected to get out of the retreat. They were told they could circle as many answers that applied to them. They had met as a group several times before this survey was administered, so this item also tests what they learned form those meetings.

Again, all students completed this question. From Graph 4, one can see that the results for the males and females are somewhat similar. However, I did find that females more than males were expecting to meet and get to know other Natural Helpers during the training retreat. This might be a result of females being more social at this age; friendship is very important to them (Thornburg, Thornburg, & Ellis-Schwabe, 1984). On the other hand, males more than females believed the retreat to be for learning how to better help their friends. This contradicts item eight where more males

GRAPH 4



Answers to Item ten, "I think the purpose of the training retreat is..."

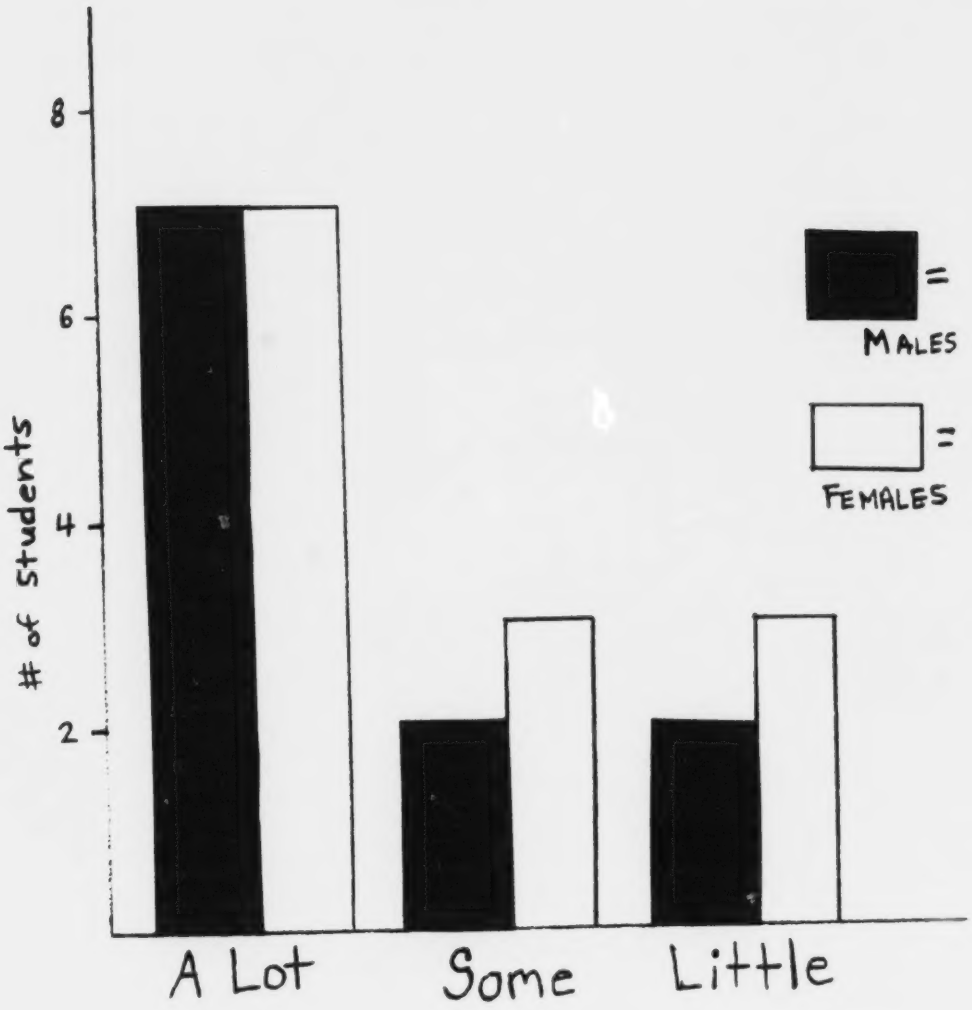
believed they could always help their friends with their problems. I would think, therefore, that the males wouldn't put as one of their main expectations "to learn how to better help my friends." All other responses by the two sexes were similar: very few chose to get out of school as an expectation, about one half of each sex believe the retreat's purpose was to teach them how to help themselves better, and about one half of each gender believed the purpose was to learn how to work in a team.

Question eleven, "After the retreat, do you think you will be...," was aimed at finding out if the students felt the training retreat would be worth their time and beneficial in teaching them how to better help their friends. Ten out of eleven boys completed this item; all females answered it. 90% of the males responded that they would be better at helping people after the retreat. 100% of the females chose this response. 10% of the males chose that they would be the same at helping their friends. 0% of the females chose this . And no one circled that they would be worse at helping people. This item shows basically no

difference in male and female views, except for the one male who felt he would be the same after the retreat.

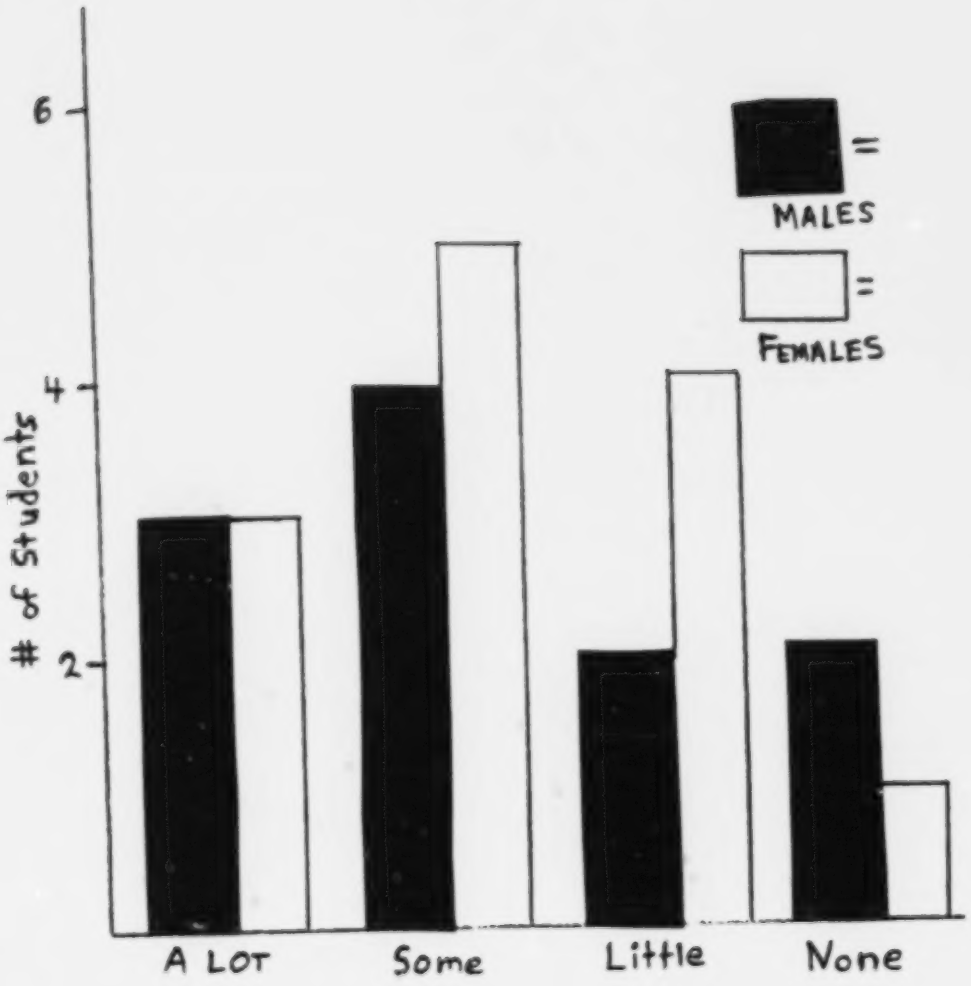
Items twelve through sixteen were designed to find out how much the students knew about drugs, birth control, pregnancy, child abuse, and places to go or call for help. The results are broken down into the following (Graphs 5 - 9): Males and Drugs: 64% know a lot, 18% know some, 18% know a little. Females and Drugs: 54% know a lot, 23% know some, 23% know a little. Males and Birth Control: 27% know a lot, 37% know some, 18% know a little, 18% know nothing. Females and Birth Control: 23% know a lot, 38% know some, 31% know a little, 8% know nothing. Males and Pregnancy: 27% know a lot, 55% know a little, 18% know nothing. Females and Pregnancy: 46% know a lot, 31% know some, 8% know a little, 15% know nothing. Males and Child Abuse: 36% know a lot, 27% know some, 27% know a little, 10% know nothing. Females and Child Abuse: 15% know a lot, 31% know some, 46% know a little, 8% know nothing. Males and Helping Places: 36% know a lot, 45% know some, 19% know a little. Females and Helping Places: 46% know a lot, 31% know

GRAPH 5



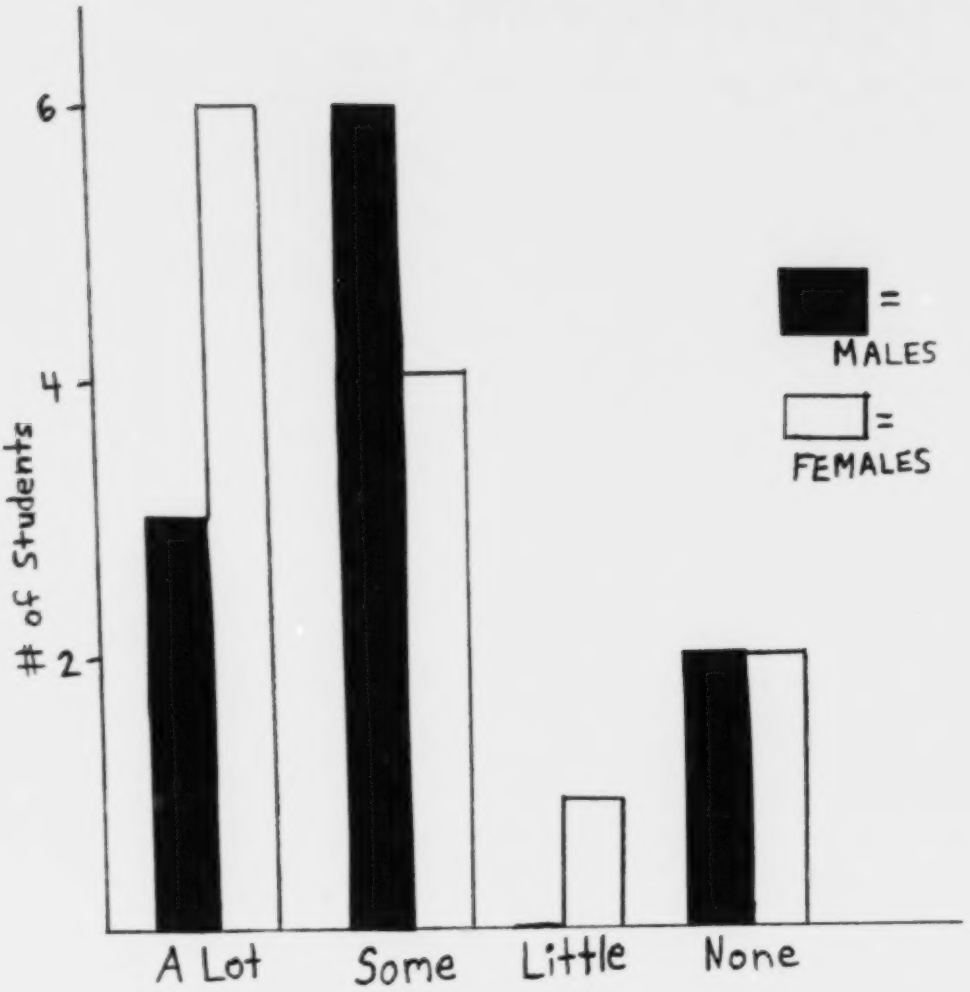
How much middle schoolers say they know about drugs.

GRAPH 6



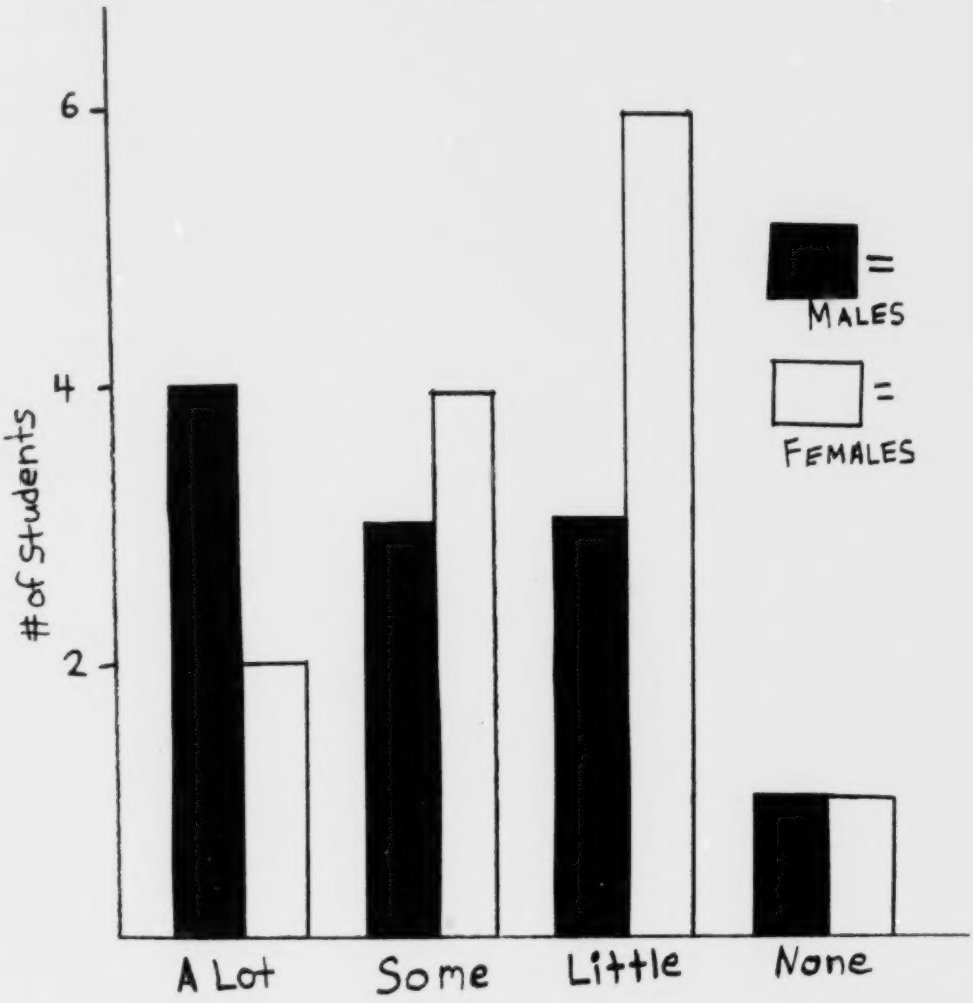
How much middle schoolers say they know about birth control.

GRAPH 7



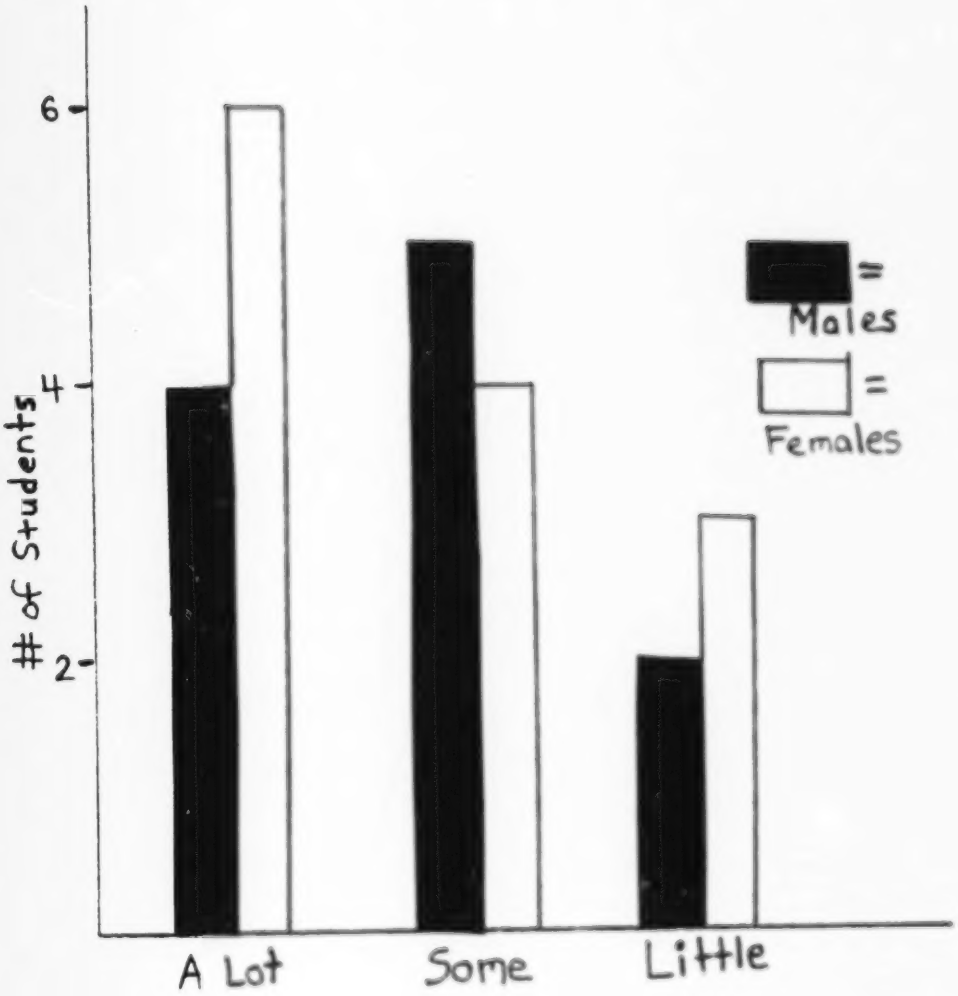
How much middle schoolers say they know about pregnancy.

GRAPH 8



How much middle schoolers say they know about child abuse.

GRAPH 9



How much middle schoolers say they know about places to go or call for help.

some, 23% know a little.

The significant findings from these results are from the topics of pregnancy and child abuse. More females than males responded that they knew a lot about pregnancy. I believe that this is because men can't become pregnant. Females know more because it happens to their bodies On the other hand, more males than females said they knew a lot about child abuse. One possible reason would be that more of the male Natural Helpers come from abusive homes. All other items were answered similarly by the students, with males generally knowing a little more than the females.

POST-TRAINING SURVEY:

The post-training survey was given to the students one and a half weeks after they returned from the retreat. With this survey, I wanted to learn whether or not differences still existed between males and females; in other words, I was looking to see if the training had focused all the Natural Helpers to the program's goals. Three of the question on the post-training survey can be found on the pre-training survey. The survey was given to the students to

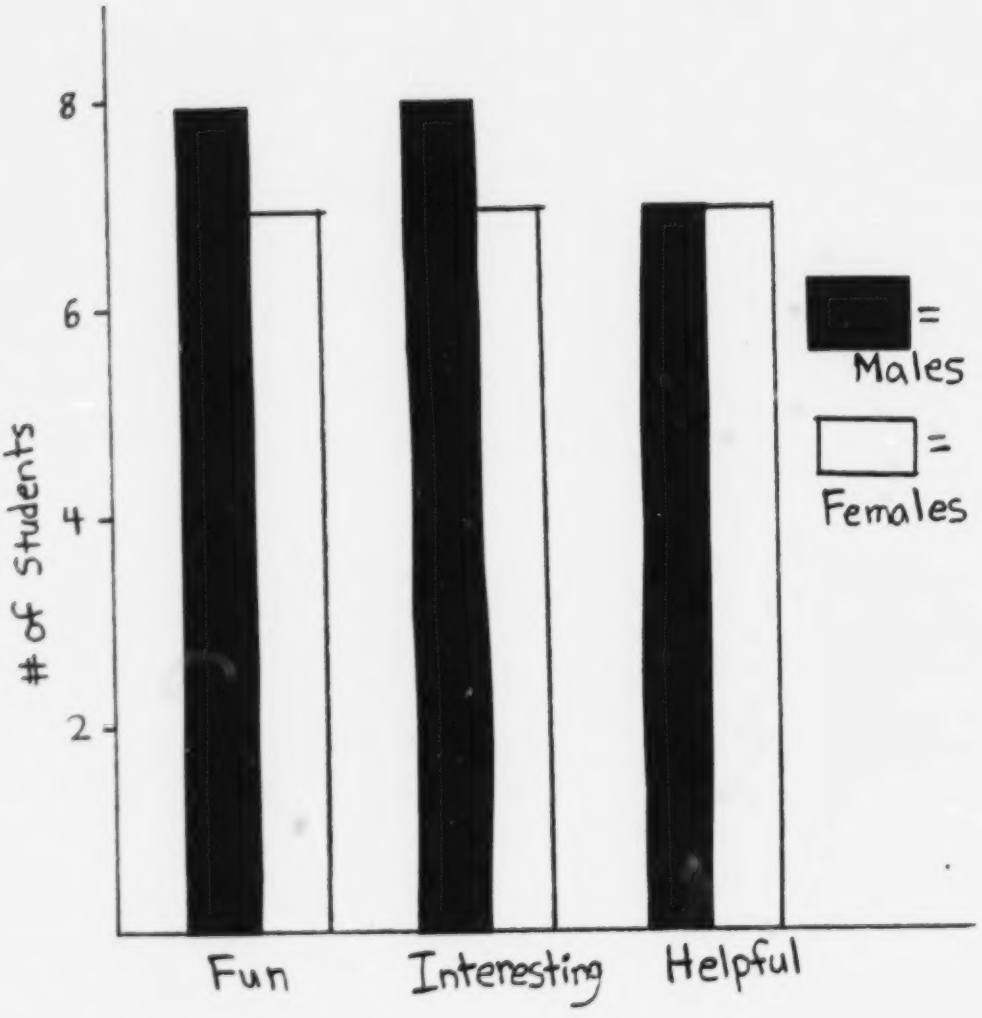
complete during homeroom. I was not able to administer it to them as a group. I received seventeen of the surveys back, with two of them from students who had not taken the pre-training survey. Nine males returned the survey: 4 seventh graders, 5 eighth graders. Eight females returned the survey: 4 seventh graders, 4 eighth graders. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix D.

Item three, "I found the retreat...," was written to discover how the students reacted to the retreat. I wished to know if they found it helpful or a waste of time. Having observed some of the participants before the retreat, I could sense how excited they were by the questions and statements they made.

Results for this question can be found in Graph 10. The students could circle as many of the answers that applied to them. No one found the retreat boring or a waste of time. The answers fun, interesting and helpful were answered with the same frequency by both the males and females. Therefore, both sexes found the retreat worth their while.

Question four, "I think the purpose of the

GRAPH 10



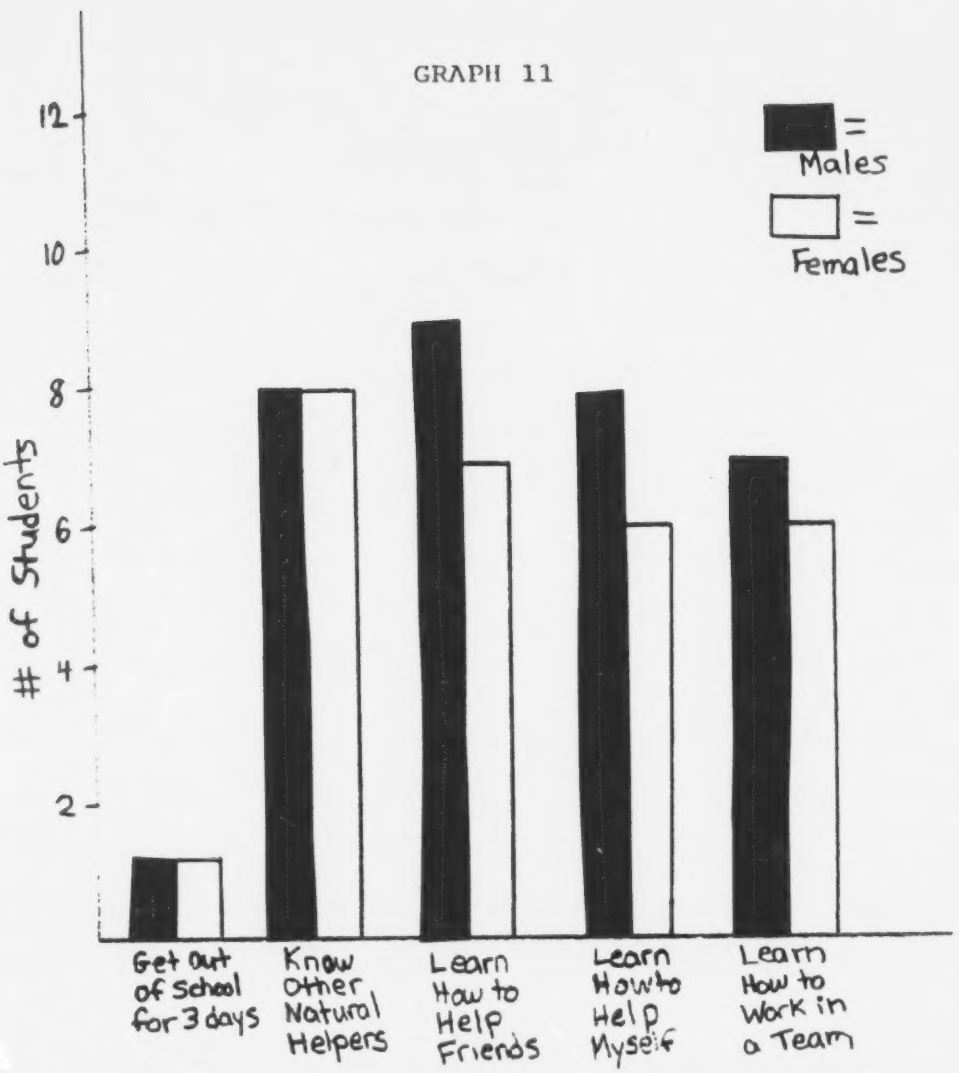
Responses to Item three, "I found the retreat..."

training retreat was...," was on the pre-training survey. This item was answered by all the participants who took the survey. I will compare the results of this question from the two surveys in my general discussion at the end, but now I wish to focus just on the post-training survey. Again, the students could circle all items that applied to them. The results are summarized in Graph 11.

The males chose the answer "to learn how to better help my friends" more frequently than the other choices. (100% chose this response) This suggests that two of the goals of the Natural Helpers Program were understood. These goals are for the participants to gain the ability to prevent some problems of adolescence and to gain the ability to help their troubled friends more effectively (CHEF, 1989). The third goal of the program which is for the participants to learn how to better help themselves was also understood, however not to such a great degree. (78% chose this as a response)

The females chose "to get to know other natural helpers, students as well as teachers" most frequently.

GRAPH 11



Answers to Question four, "I think the purpose of the training retreat was..."

This might reflect the age of the students where the females are quite social. Over 75% chose to better help their friends and 75% chose to better help myself. Again, these are good results showing that the students were aware of the goals.

Question five from the survey, "Do you believe you can help your friends and yourself better now?" was similar to items three and four, for I wanted to know if the students felt they had learned anything useful. This too was on the pre-training survey. All participants answered the question.

A small difference occurred between the way the males and females completed this question. 89% of the males believed they could now better help their friends and themselves, and 11% weren't sure whether or not they were better helpers. The females, on the other hand, all believed they could help more now From these results, I believe that the females are more sure of themselves when it comes to helping. However, the results are ambiguous to an extent, for the 11% of the males who didn't know if they were now better helpers could be due to uncertainty of helping their friends or

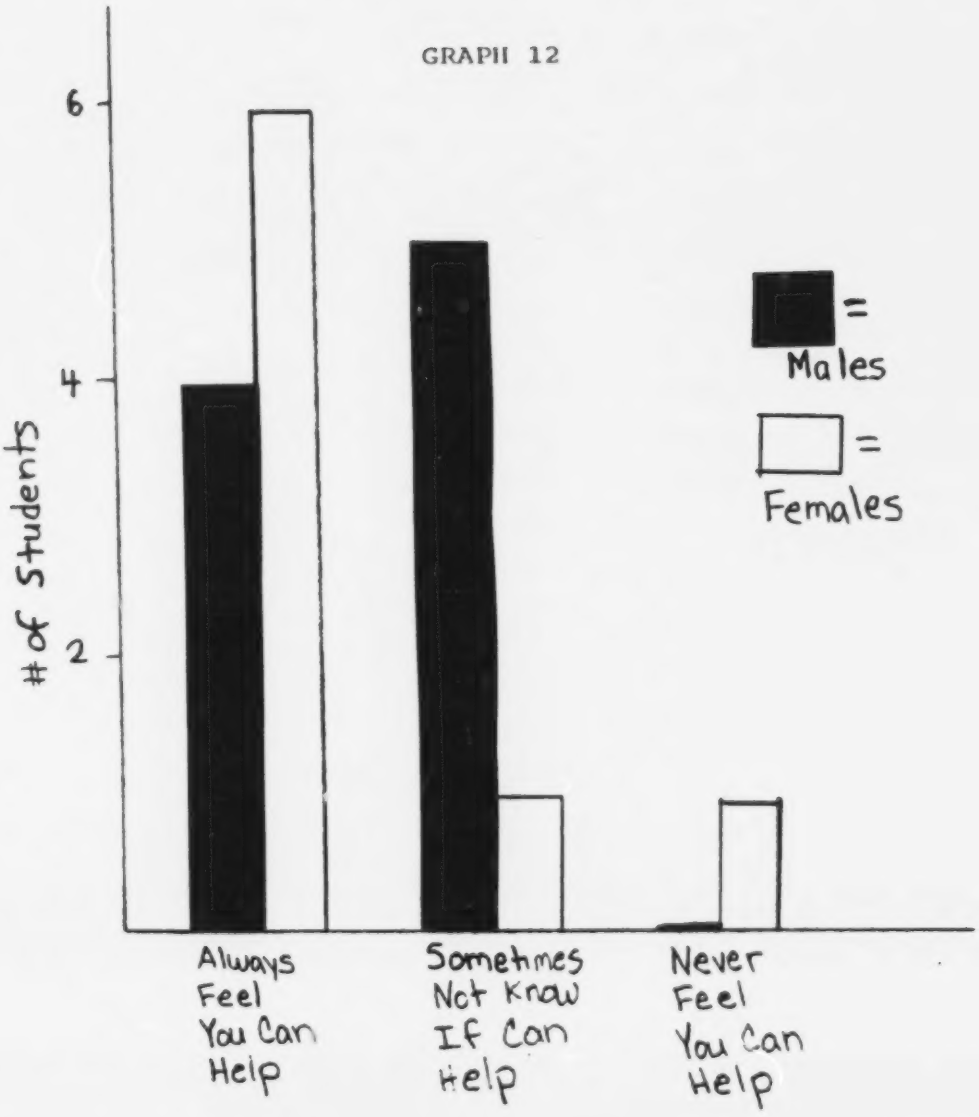
due to uncertainty of helping themselves.

Number six, "When your friends now come to you with a problem, you will...," is also from the pre-training survey. The Natural Helpers program wants the participants to come away with better helping skills, but also for the participants to be aware of their limitations. Therefore, this item is designed to find out if the students understand that there are times where they cannot help. All students answered this item. The results are depicted in Graph 12.

75% of the females answered they could always help where only 44% of the males answered in this way. There are two possible explanations for this. One, the females do not recognize their limitations as the males do. Two, the females believe they can always help <u>in some way</u>. This explanation supports the results from the previous item where the females are more sure of themselves when it comes to helping.

Question seven, "How did you feel about sharing something about yourself?" was written to see if there were any discrepancies in the openness of the male and female participants. At the final meeting before the

GRAPH 12



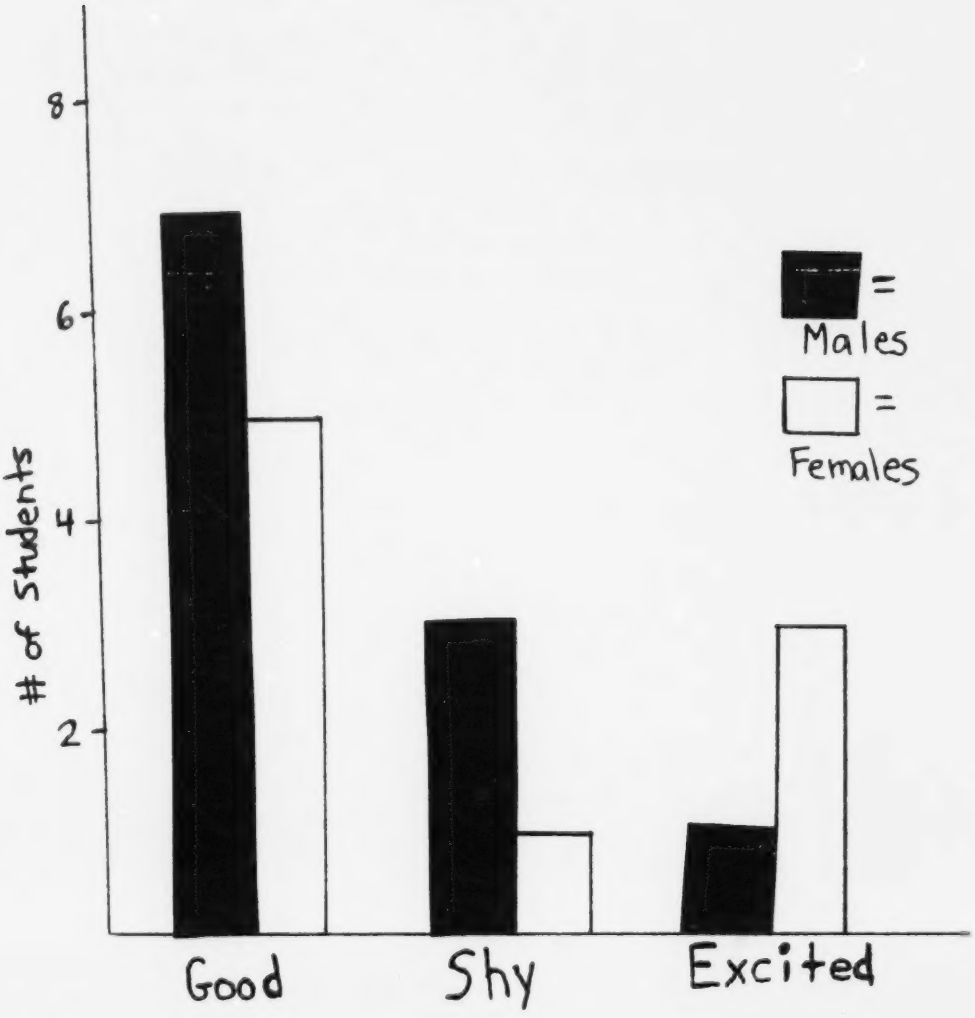
Answers to Question six, "When your friends now come to you with a problem, you will..."

retreat, there were concerns from both males and females about sharing time. I was told by someone involved with the program that it is very emotional when each student shares something about him/herself. The purpose is for the students, who represent all the subgroups of the school, to realize how similar they are. The students were to circle one answer, although two males and one female circled more than one. The results from the question can be found in Graph 13.

None of the males or females claimed they felt embarrassed or stupid when sharing. Both the boys and girls chose "good" most frequently, suggesting that the participants feel good and comfortable with themselves. This is most likely a reason why they were chosen by their friends as a natural helper. A higher percentage of boys than girls felt shy about sharing. This could be due to the stereotype that girls can share and talk about their feelings, but boys cannot because it is not manly.

Question eight, "How much did you learn about YOURSELF during the retreat?" was answered by all the participants. This questions was aimed to find if the

GRAPH 13



Answers to Item seven, "How did you feel about sharing something about yourself?"

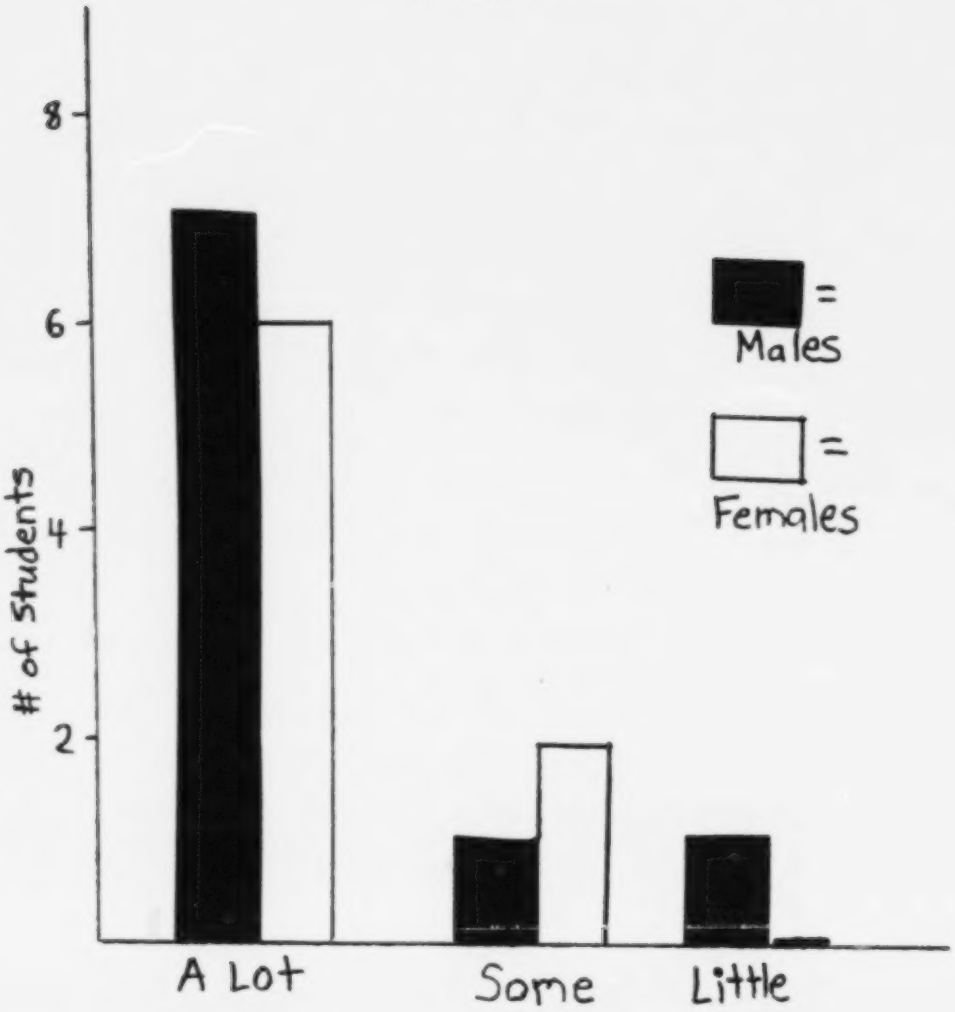
students had learned how to better help themselves and also if they had discovered their limits as a helper.

Neither gender said they learned a little or none about themselves. 75% of the females responded that they had learned a lot about themselves, where only 67% of the males chose this response. (25% females, 33% males chose "some") This supports the previous results that the females more than the males are more confident when helping. If you know more about yourself, then you would be better able to help others.

Question nine, "How much did you learn about OTHER people during the retreat?" was written to see if the students had come away from the retreat realizing how similar they all are even though they come from different "cliques." The retreat included lessons on the harmful effects of labeling. All students answered this question. The results are summarized in Graph 14, where one can see that no great difference exists in the way males and females answered this question.

Item ten, "During the retreat, you learned the Helping Skill. When you now help a friend will you...," is the last multiple choice item on the

GRAPH 14



Responses to Question nine, "How much did you learn about OTHER people during the retreat?"

survey. The Helping Skill, which is a values clarification strategy, was taught to the students as a way for them to better help their peers. The choices the students had to chose from were always, sometimes, or never use the skill. I did not attend the retreat, so I do not know if this skill was introduced as another way of helping or THE way to help. All students answered this item.

There was a small, yet insignificant, gender difference in the answers to this item. No one chose never as a response. 75% of the females said they would always use the skill where 67% of the males responded in this way. 33% of the males said they would sometimes use the skill, where only 25% of the females chose this. Looking at these results, I would deduce that both sexes found the Helping Skill worthwhile to learn and will use it in future situations with their friends.

The next three questions were open response. Number eleven, "How do you think the retreat could have trained you better?" was answered by seven females and seven males. This question was designed to find out

the weaknesses of the training from the students' point of view. About 50% of the males felt the training was fine as is, where the other males believed that three days was too short. 50% of the females also stated the program was fine as is. Only one female suggested a longer retreat, and another female suggested that similar activities should be combined. These responses show little variety in the views of the males and females. Overall, all the participants were pleased, with a slightly higher percentage of boys believing the retreat should be extended.

Item twelve, "What was your favorite part of the retreat?" was written to see what part of the retreat went over the best. One male and one female put "food" as their favorite part. More males than females said the activities were their favorite, although the females, too, enjoyed them. Also, one female said she enjoyed meeting new people and another female wrote she enjoyed getting away from school. One significant finding from this question was the frequency that "sharing" was put down as a response. All females who answered this question listed "sharing" in their

response, where only one male wrote this. I believe this is due to the stereotype that males who share and talk about their feelings are "wimps."

The last question asked the students to put down the one most important thing they learned form the retreat. The most popular response from both sexes was the Helping Skill. On the other hand, one male and three females wrote "to know your limits." One female wrote "to help yourself first." More females might have said "know your limits" or "to help yourself first" as most important because they feel more stress than males when dealing with others' problems. These responses show that they now know it is okay not to always be able to help. Lastly, one male responded, "don't judge people by what others tell you."

From these results, I learned that these children had learned a lot from the retreat. Where most found the Helping Skill the most useful, others found knowing your limits as important. Each student had internalized the training.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the male and female natural helpers had many of the same views on the program and on their role as a natural helper. There were some notable differences which I will now discuss.

Number ten on the pre-training survey and number four on the post-training questionnaire both asked the students to respond to the purpose of the Natural Helpers Retreat. The students could circle as many answers that applied. On the post-training survey, more students circled more responses suggesting that the students had become aware of the program's goals. However, the most frequent responses stayed the same. More males chose "to learn how to better help my friends," and more females chose " to get to know other natural helpers, students as well as teachers." This stayed the same on both surveys, showing a difference in what the two sexes found important from the retreat.

Number eleven on the pre-training survey and number five on the post-training survey asked the participants if after the training they would be better, the same, or worse at helping their peers. On

both surveys, all the females believed they could help their friends better after the retreat. On both surveys, most of the males believed they would be better, with a few unsure if they would increase their ability to help. This suggests that the females believe they are more capable of helping friends.

Number eight on the pre-training survey and number six on the post-training survey both ask the students if they always, sometimes, or never believe they can help their friends. On the pre-training survey, more males felt that they could always help where on the post-training survey, more females stated that they could always help. Where the males were first sure of themselves of helping, now were recognizing their limitations. And where the females were first unsure of their helping skills, now had the confidence that they could help their friends in some way.

Other findings include that females are more comfortable in sharing and talking about their feelings. This might be why more peers feel comfortable going to a female with their problems. Also, females know more about pregnancy where the males

know more about child abuse. Lastly, females more than males have dealt with a suicidal friend.

AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

I originally had decided to focus on age as a possible reason for differences in views of the natural helpers. I believe that this would be a good study where middle and high school natural helpers are compared. Interestingly, one counselor involved in the Natural Helpers program in another county of Virginia stated that middle schoolers did not have the maturity to profit from such a program as the Natural Helpers.

Still another study could be done on the effectiveness of the program. One could look at whether or not certain things such as drug abuse or teenage pregnancy declines after the program is implemented. The students who are not natural helpers could be interviewed or surveyed to find out their views of the effectiveness of the program.

Lastly, a study such as mine focusing on gender could be implemented using a different age group. I believe that it is important to take gender into

account when choosing and training Natural Helpers. To understand the differences in males and females and act on those differences could make a program more effective.

5) I was chosen as a Natural Helper, because...

(circle all that apply)

a) my friends trust me.

b) I'm popular.

c) I'm good at solving problems.

d) I know many resources (example: drug dependency center) to refer people for help.

e) I'm sympathetic and know how to listen well.

6. I have had which of the following come to me with a problem.

a) boys

b) girls

c) both boys and girls

7. I have had people come to me with the following problems.

(circle all that apply)

a) drugs, including alcohol and tobacco

b) trouble at home

c) trouble with friends

d) trouble with a boyfriend or girlfriend

e) thinking of suicide

f) pregnancy

8. When my friends come to me with a problem, I...

a) always feel I can help.

b) sometimes don't know if I can help.

c) listen, but don't feel I can help them.

9. I can tell when a person has a problem, because...

a) they tell me.

b) someone else tells me.

c) the way a person looks.

10. I think the purpose of the training retreat is...

(circle all that apply)

a) to get out of school for three days.

b) to get to know other natural helpers, students as well as teachers.

c) to learn how to better help my friends.

d) to learn how to better help myself.

e) to learn how to work with a team.

11. After the retreat, do you think you will be...

a) better at helping people.

b) the same at helping people.

c) worse at helping people.

How much do you know about the following topics?

	A LOT	SOME	LITTLE	NOTHING
12. Drugs	a	b	c	d
13. Birth Control	a	b	c	d
14. Pregnancy	a	b	c	d
15. Child Abuse	a	b	c	d

16. Places

to go or

call for

help a b c d

APPENDIX B

From: INSTRUCTIONS: ADMINISTERING THE NATURAL HELPERS SURVEY

READ ALOUD TO THE STUDENTS:

Most people have problems of one kind or another. Often they go to another student or adult at school to talk things over or to get some help.

To make good help available to more people, the school is establishing a Natural Helpers program. We're going to give you a survey, which will take about 15 minutes to fill out. On this survey we'd like you to do two things: first, identify people in this school you trust and to whom you can talk if you have a problem; and second, identify the kinds of concerns that you believe are major issues for you and your friends.

It's important that you complete the survey yourself, without talking to anyone else about your ideas.

Give careful thought to the people's names you write on the answer sheet, so that they really are trusted, helpful, caring people for YOU.

Remember, they don't need to be the smartest, or the best-looking, or the most athletic, or the most popular students in school. They need to be the people you trust to help you if you came to them with a problem.

The adults you list can be a teacher, coach, administrator, secretary, custodian, aide, cook, counselor, librarian, or a nurse-any adult in the school.

What you write is anonymous and confidential. I will not read your survey. The surveys will be tabulated later, and the results will be used to select prospective Natural Helpers. Those people who are selected will be notified and given the chance to participate in the program. Putting a person's name on the survey doesn't mean that that person has to participate in the program.

Any questions?

APPENDIX C

SURVEY

THE NATURAL HELPERS PROGRAM

This survey affects you! Please complete it carefully. Results from this survey will be used to select and train individuals within the school to provide help to students who want it. Your response is confidential and anonymous.

READ EACH QUESTION CAREFULLY. Please mark your answer by circling the corresponding letter. Please mark only one answer for questions 1-3.

1. I am: a) female b) male

2. I am: a) a 7th grader b) an 8th grader
c) school personnel

3. When I have a problem, I usually try to get help form:

    a) a friend

    b) a parent

    c) an adult at school (e.g., teacher, counselor)

    d) an adult outside of school (e.g., youth worker, neighbor, relative, family friend)

    e) a brother or sister

DIRECTIONS FOR QUESTION 4: Read the items lettered a-x. Select the top FIVE school concerns that you believe are major issues for you and your friends and circle the corresponding letters. (Adults: Select the top FIVE school concerns that you believe are major issues for students in the school.)

a) Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, or threats of same)

b) Achievement in school (grades, goals)

c) Career or college choices

d) Depression

e) Dropping out or being suspended/disciplined

f) Drug use (marijuana, alcohol, cocaine, nicotine)

g) Eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, obesity, weight control)

h) Family (communication, relationships, conflicts with family members)

i) Friendships (jealousy, communication, support)

j) Gossip/Rumors

k) Loneliness

l) Loss (separation, divorce, death)

m) Money (school expenses, living expenses, getting a job)

n) Peer pressure

o) Popularity (fitting in, belonging)

p) Pregnancy

q) Romantic relationships (girlfriend/boyfriend)

r) Self-image

s) Sex-related concerns (sexual/romantic behavior, birth control, sexual identity)

t) Sexually transmitted diseases (AIDS, chlamydia, gonorrhea, etc.)

u) Stress (not enough time, other pressures)

v) Thoughts of suicide, self-destructive actions, and high-risk behaviors

w) World issues (hunger, war, etc.)

x) Others: Please indicate below.

5. List the names of two adults at this school you trust and with whom you feel comfortable talking about a personal problem. Write their full names if you know them.

1.

2.

6. Students only: List the names and grade levels of two students at this school you trust and with whom you feel comfortable talking about a personal problem. Write their full names if you know them.

1.

2.

APPENDIX D

POST-TRAINING SURVEY

1. I am a

    a) seventh grader

    b) eighth grader

2. I am

    a) male

    b) female

3. I found the retreat...

    (circle all that apply)

    a) fun.

    b) interesting.

    c) helpful.

    d) a waste of time.

    e) boring.

4. I think the purpose of the training retreat was...

   (circle all that apply)

   a) to get out of school for three days.

   b) to get to know other natural helpers, students as well as teachers.

   c) to learn how to better help my friends.

   d) to learn how to better help myself.

   e) to learn how to work with a team.

5. Do you believe you can help your friends and yourself better now?

   a) yes

   b) no

   c) I don't know

6. When your friends now come to you with a problem, you will...

   a) always feel you can help.

   b) sometimes not know if you can help.

c) listen, but not feel you can help.

7. How did you feel about sharing something about yourself?

   a) good

   b) embarrassed

   c) shy

   d) excited

   e) stupid

8. How much did you learn about YOURSELF during the retreat?

   a) a lot

   b) some

   c) a little

   d) none

9. How much did you learn about OTHER people during the retreat?

   a) a lot

   b) some

c) a little

d) none

10. During the retreat, you learned the Helping Skill. When you now help a friend will you...

    a) always use the Helping Skill.

    b) sometimes use the Helping Skill.

    c) never use the Helping Skill.

11. How do you think the retreat could have trained you better?

12. What was your favorite part of the retreat?

13. What was the ONE most important thing you learned during the retreat?

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